

Southern Planter

1820-1860

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SOUTHERN PLANTER

1820-1860

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PREFACE

In this study I have endeavored to exhibit the strongly marked types of Southern people in various sections due to the historical and physiographical reasons. Second, the problem matter in regard to the general precariousness of economic life, a condition arising from a certain thriftlessness, from the despoiling of fertility, from ignorance of scientific methods in agriculture, from ineffective and unreliable labor, promoted a western migration or frequently bankruptcy. Third, the dominance of the plantation resulted in a ruralized, not an urbanized society; the isolation of the plantation took the individual out of the set mold of convention. The structure of the plantation which gave the white master uncommon power and subjected him to uncommon influences; these factors obviously tended to develop a unique character. For the people of the anti-bellum South were a happy people who cared more for laughter than for tears. Even people of refinement would find diversion in the roughest pranks and would laugh unrestrainedly over predicaments that were both painful and unfortunate.

And last the Southern Planter was more like gentlemen of fortune than any other settlers in America. There were a number of highly educated planters and most of these men manifested extraordinary felicity in the social utilization of such culture as they possessed. Society in the

more conspicuous expressions of forum, pulpit, printed page and conversation in certain circles was remarkable for a mastery of parts of classical literature. No people could make larger use of such a resource.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Two Leading Types of Southern Planters

The planter in the plantation system of production was the central figure. He was the one who took the initiative to procure land, labor and capital, assumed the risk of their combination.

The two leading types of Southern population were the Virginians and South Carolinians of tidewater. For this fact there were both historical and physiographical reasons. Virginia was the first and South Carolina the second Southern colony to be settled by well-to-do Englishmen who desired to found permanent homes.

"The introduction of slavery and its application to staple crops speedily gave an aristocratic tone to society in both provinces; but between them, in North Carolina, and to the south of them, in Georgia, there were fewer wealthy settlers and no staple crops to speak of, so that from the first, society in these provinces was more or less democratic in spite of slavery. Before, however, the gentry of the coast could expand and occupy the country lying between Blue Ridge and the Alleghenies, and beyond the latter range of mountains, a very different sort of people had moved in and taken possession. Hardy Scot-Irish Presbyterians, thrifty German Lutherans, sober and industrious Quakers had occupied the 'up country', and in North Carolina has spread toward the coast. Among these people, due to their habits and the nature of the soil, slavery could take no strong hold; they remained democratic and distinct from the tidewater neighbors, as they are to this day."¹

1. William Peterfield Trent, *Dominant Tendencies of the South*, Atlantic Monthly, Vol. LXXIX, Jan. 1907, p. 42.

After the Revolution, tidewater Virginians in consequence of debt and the impoverishment of the land, determined to emigrate, they passed over the two mountain ranges and settled in Kentucky, or went as far to the southwest as Alabama, later on, while the hardy mountain people, hungry for land and eager for adventure, moved along the valley and other convenient passes and founded settlements, the more important of which were destined to grow into the distinctively democratic commonwealth of Tennessee.

The invention of the cotton gin made it worth the South Carolinian's time to stay at home, and opened up to immigration and settlement the states bordering on the Gulf. As in the case of all new countries, the inflowing population was extremely mixed, but the man who had the most slaves could clear his land and start his cotton sooner.

In the lower tier of southwestern states aristocracy triumphed, on the whole, over democracy, aided by the presence of French and Spanish population of Mobile and New Orleans. But in the midst of all this movement the tidewater Virginians and South Carolinians stood for political and social ideals to which the rest of the South and Southwest bowed until the event of Jackson and his frontier Democrats to power. The Virginian fell before the storm, but the South Carolinian bent and rose again. Slavery, not Tennessee democracy, represented the aspirations of the Southern people during the three decades before the Civil War, and slavery's banner Calhoun and his South Carolinians were obviously best fitted to bear."²

2. Ibid., p. 42.

The Virginian is more democratic than the South Carolinian; he has more good nature; he is not nearly so punctious, or stern, or fiery.

"The Virginian developed from a seventeenth-century into an eighteenth-century English squire."³

He became an easy-going optimist, fond of good company and good living, never so vulgar as Squire Western, but likely to fall into careless, slipshod habits unless upheld, as was often the case, by the refined women about him. With the South Carolinian it appears to have been different. He took life more seriously than the Virginian did. He has the earnestness and much of the courtly charm of the best type of seventeenth century Englishman.

"Eminently social and hospitable and generous is a Virginian, at home or abroad. They are so by nature and habit. These qualities and their exercise develop and strengthen other virtues. By reason of these social traits, they necessarily become well mannered, honorable, spirited, and careful, desirous of pleasing, and skilled in the accomplishments which please."⁴

3. T. N. Page, Social Life in Old Virginia, p. 43.
 4. Joseph G. Baldwin, The Flush Times of Alabama and Mississippi, p. 79

CHAPTER II

COTTON PRODUCTION

Number of Plantations and Slaves

"The total population of our country in 1850 was more than 23,000,000."¹

"Nineteen and one half million were white, three and one half million were slaves owned by 347,500 masters. There were 74,031 cotton plantations, 157,450 tobacco plantations, 8,327 hemp plantations. Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi, and South Carolina grew two thirds of the cotton crop. Maryland, Virginia, Kentucky, and Tennessee were tobacco states. Kentucky and Missouri were the hemp states."²

"There were 34,658 slaveholders in North Carolina in 1860 and these owned in all 331,059 slaves, or an average of 9.6 to each owner. In Virginia there were 9.4 slaves to each owner, and in South Carolina there were 15. For North Carolina there had been from 1850 to 1860 a lessening of the number of the slaves to an owner, since it was in 1850 10.1 slaves to each owner."³

Production and Marketing of Cotton

Cotton was such a profitable crop. All the energies of the Southern planter were devoted to extending the cotton area, other crops being completely neglected. At the same time slavery was firmly established on an economic foundation and so far as the South was concerned the whole gain of the extension of cotton culture went to build up and extend the system of slavery. Planters had little or no conception of efficiency in organization

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1. J. B. Dewow, Census Reports, 1850.
 2. J. B. McMaster, History of the People of the United States, VIII, 1850-1861, p. 282.
 3. J. S. Bassett, Slavery in the State of North Carolina p.78

as a means of reducing the cost of production and consequently increasing the margin of profits from the sale of their crops.

"Their plantations frequently included thousands of acres and from the big plantations came the bulk of the cotton crop. The average annual value was about twenty million of dollars."⁴

Cotton culture was very simple, requiring few tools and only routine work. It gave employment for nine months in the year, so that the slave was idle very little of the time. And, most important of all it permitted the organization of labor on a large scale.

"A single slave could not cultivate more than three or four acres as compared with thirty or forty acres of corn, and they could therefore be more compactly massed than in the case of cereal crops."⁵

Owing to their ignorance and lack of versatility, it was possible to employ the negroes only on staple crops which called for mechanical labor. The existence in the South of a crop like cotton, which met these requirements, firmly entrenched slavery and caused rapid extension.

Under the system of slavery a large part of the capital of Southern planters which would otherwise have taken the form of improved lands, building, and machinery had been invested in slaves.

4. Brown, The Lower South in American History, p. 23.

5. Phillips, Plantation and Frontier Documents, Vol.I, p. 187

"In 1860 the value of slaves was \$2,000,000,000. At this time there were 3,953,760 slaves."⁶

In the planting states this form of property greatly exceeded all others, both real and personal. The Civil War not only swept away this form of property, but resulted in the destruction of buildings, tools, cattle and other capital. Borrowing Professor Beard's recent term; "the South took its punishment, precisely as a vegetable economy always does when trading with a mineral economy."

Marketing of Cotton

The supreme attractiveness of cotton was due to the readiness for which it could be turned into money, the simplicity of the methods by which it was grown and the comparative ease which it could be marketed, even in a country of bad roads. Cotton was hauled from the plantation to the nearest river bluff, the bales went sliding down on incline to waiting steamboats and was shipped on to Mobile, New Orleans, Boston and Liverpool. The planter perhaps followed his crop as far as Mobile or New Orleans, made a settlement and returned with his supplies for another year. With few exceptions the planter with his large number of slaves to raise the cotton crop became merely "nouveaux rich". By the accumulation of property and economic power this group brought into existence the so-called "Southern Aristocracy." While the social and

6. Jos. C. G. Kennedy, Preliminary Report of the Eighth Census 1860.

economic conditions continued to be those of rural aristocracy based on slavery. While such a life was full of graciousness and hospitality and all the high social virtues that come of a feudal aristocracy tended towards conservatism and individualism. These qualities made the Southern Planter desire to have things remain as they were politically and economically.

Problem of Efficient Labor

A common economic problem of slavery was that of getting efficient work done by slave labor. Many of the negroes were lazy and shirked their duties. This involved an economic loss to the owner. The yearly cost for the support of a negro in 1840 reported by the English traveler, J. S. Buckingham, was \$400. The items involved in this yearly cost were interest in the capital invested in him, cost of maintenance (food, clothing, and lodging), depreciation, taxation, and insurance against death, sickness, and flight. Few were capable of doing efficient labor without the direction of the overseer or driver.

Waste of Land

Another problem, in time the plantation became exploitative and wasteful. Land was cultivated without fertilization until it was completely exhausted, then a new area was cleared and the former tract abandoned.

"It is estimated that this method required as much as seventy acres of fresh land annually to run even a small plantation."⁷

7. E. L. Bogart, Economic History of United States, p. 300.

The absence of rotation and diversification of crops and of fertilizers to prevent the exhaustion of the soil, of improved live stock, of machinery and fences; in short, the lack of scientific agriculture even among the small planters without slaves, was a frequent matter of complaint in southern journals and conventions. The large plantations were confined to the rich alluvial lands of the Mississippi bottoms. Absenteeism of the owner was not frequent, as the planter's life was regarded as an ideal one. On large plantations the management was generally left to the overseer, who sought to obtain the largest possible crop without regards to the future. The profits secured from the cotton production, instead of going to improve the land, was sunk in the purchase of fresh fields and more slaves. The capital of the South was thus invested in fixed forms which tied it down to prevailing methods and permitted no improvements or diversification from year to year.

"When capital migrated westward to new and fertile soil, the older regions were left with exhausted soils and without resources for development. This region became stagnant and retained traits of the frontier which have persisted even to the present day."⁸

The steady movement westward received an impetus from the Louisiana Purchase. New settlements were founded and communities which before had been made up of those of French

8. W. T. Couch, Culture in the South, p. 425.

birth and extraction came to have in them a large infusion of Americans.

"There was an element of venture and danger in this large movement of population, such as vested it with a degree of romance. Americans, too as they went, were the zealous propagandists of the blessings of civil liberty they had achieved."⁹

In this new country there were adventurers, with broken fortunes, ever ready to hope that glory and wealth might be found in the regions beyond. There were political dreamers who desired to try new social experiments in fresh fields.

"In taking Louisiana we were the accomplices of the greatest highwayman of modern history, and the goods which we received were those which Napoleon compelled his unwilling victim to discharge."¹⁰

Moving from one location to another was a very simple and inexpensive process. This was completed between seasons.

Overseer

The head manager on the plantation was the overseer. This was a white man who was engaged at an annual salary, of from three hundred to five hundred dollars, or more, according to the extent of planting business, and generally one servant to assist his household.

His duties were to superintend the general manage-

9. Papers of American Historical Association, Vol. I, No.4, p.21

10. Edward Channing, The Jeffersonian System, p. 79.

ment of affairs--consulting with the owner and acting under his direction--to see to the proper preparation of the land, planting of the crop, its cultivation and the harvest, looking after the livestock, and all other matters which needed supervision. Orders were passed through him to the foreman. If he was a just and humane person, he enjoyed the confidence of the negroes, but when otherwise, was cordially hated.

The next in authority was the foreman, or "Driver" as he was called. He received his orders every evening from the Overseer as to the work for the next day. He laid off the tasks to each worker, and it was his duty to be in the fields and with the workers, and to see it was well done. He was selected as the most intelligent and trustworthy--one who could command respect from the negroes--and held his office for life, or during good behavior.

"The Driver's office was considered one of trust and importance and he was disposed to maintain his dignity. At meal times, when they all messed together, he would retire from the crowd, and take his meals apart. This aristocratic pretension, however, did not attach to his family. They remained the plebeians, and no difference was made or recognized. But as human nature is the same the world over, there were often an inclination to help his kindred with a lighter task or to wink at their shortcomings, and this always claimed the vigilance of the master and the Overseer in the inspection of work."¹¹

Each overseer regulated the hours of work on his

11. Henry William Ravenel, *Recollections of Southern Plantation Life*. The Yale Review, Summer 1936, p. 760.

owner's plantation. Negroes were working before sunrise and after sunset. At about eight o'clock they were allowed to stop for breakfast, and again about noon to dine. The length of these rests was at the direction of the overseer, from half an hour to an hour.

"The number of hands directed by each overseer was considerably over one hundred. The manager thought it would be better economy to have a white man over fifty hands, but the difficulty of obtaining trustworthy overseers prevented it. The great majority being passionate, careless, inefficient men, generally intemperate and totally unfitted for the duties of the position."¹²

The best overseers, ordinarily, were young men, the sons of small planters, who would take up the business temporarily as a means of acquiring a little capital with which to purchase land and negroes for themselves.

It is frequently the case, that the planter has started as a poor and entirely self-dependent young man, the basis of whose present fortune consisted of his savings from the farm, the wages earned by him as overseer--these were commonly as illiterate as the very poorest of the northern agricultural laborers. While on the other hand, there were those who, beginning, in the same way, have acquired, while so employed, not only capital with which to purchase land and slaves but a valuable stock of experience.

"Men crowded together in cities seeking chiefly money, in no wise rooted to the soil, thrown no

12. Olmsted, Journey in the Back Country, p. 81.

permanent relations of superior and inferior, could not be expected to develop those intangible, indefinable social qualities which made Southerners of the planter class intelligible and companionable to English country gentlemen, not because of their birth, but because of their habits of life and thought and speech."¹³

The Lower South understood the black man as slave, and understood him as a citizen. The whole of anti-bellum society encouraged the middle-man system on the plantations, and the faults of the overseer often obscured the virtues of the master.

"When the emigrant brought his property from Virginia, the negro was brought also; in fact, the value of the slave in the Upper South was dependent upon his demand in the Lower South. Virginia was thus materially affected. There is an outside view of the slave question that does injustice to the South at large. Statistics have never reached the spirit of a civilization, however near they may approach the fact. Travelers through the Southern states during the existence of slavery saw only half the true conditions. The Southerner treated his slave with more leniency than the Northerner did the free black man."¹⁴

13. Brown, *The Lower South in American History*, p. 50.

14. *The South in the Building of the Nation*. Vol. X, p. 30.

CHAPTER III

PLANTATION CHARACTERS

Plantation Characters

On the plantation the three outstanding characters are the belle, the negro, and the planter.

The plantation belle is usually credited with lavish costumes; therefore she concentrates in herself much of the tradition of social splendor, from the sheen of wealth in a social order is often most glittering in the attire of its womanhood. Extreme youthfulness is another device used in giving the plantation belle a distinction. She is portrayed both impulsive and reserved; frivolous, even inconsiderate, but charitable; frank, yet coquettish. Her social attainments were considerable. Poise of manner, resourcefulness and ease of conversation, sparkling vivacity, refinement of judgement, graceful supervision of entertainment, skill in dancing and musical culture, these faculties seemed instinctive.

"She is presented not merely as a hot house flower; she is much at home in the out-door world of horse and hound."¹

A southern gentleman wanted in a daughter usually what he had found in his wife. A Virginian on request gave counsel; "The control of the temper is of the first importance to the elevated standing of every woman.

1. Louisa P. Looney, *The Southern Planter of the Fifties*, p.124

Learn to be cheerful, sociable and agreeable. Half the disappointments and vexations we meet with in the world had as well be the subject of our amusement as our tears."

Her manners were as perfectly formed as her mother's with more self-possession. Her beauty was a title which gave her a graciousness that well be-fitted her.

"She never 'came out' because she had never been 'in'; and the line between girlhood and young-ladyhood was never known."²

She was generally an outrageous flirt. It was said the worst flirts made the most devoted wives. It was simply an instinct and an inheritance.

Of the negro characters, the old Mammy was most important and loved. She was the zealous, faithful, and efficient assistant in the care and training of children. Next to her in importance and rank were the Butler and the Carriage-driver. These with the Mammy were the aristocrats of the family who train the children in good manners.

"The cook is of greatest significance; stable-boys, body-servants, maids, master-musicians, cook helpers and a host of field-servants."³

"The matter of trade between the negroes and the small stores was always a fruitful source of trouble and annoyance to the planters. Not only was the price of goods exorbitant, but whiskey, rum, and other contraband articles were freely

2. T. N. Page, op. cit., p. 52.

3. Page, The Old-Time Negro, Scribner's, Nov. 1904, (Reprint).

sold to them, and stolen goods (cotton, corn, and other plantation supplies) taken in exchange. To correct this evil, the custom was adopted of having a store on the plantation with such simple goods as the negroes would want most."⁴

It checked the evil completely, and the plantation store became a successful and ameliorating institution, and was generally adopted. In order to furnish no excuse for dealing with the country stores, it was the custom to take everything the negroes wished to sell, whether wanted or not, and pay them the market price. This was found to work well, as it stimulated them to industrious habits, and they got better prices for their produce.

The Planter

The planter was really a nobleman, subject only to such modifications as superficially conform to the Declaration of Independence. He accepted titles.

"He believed devoutly in his own aristocracy, a heritage of nobility from an ancestry of which he was proud."⁵

He is punctilious in dress, courtesy of manner extended from delicate deference shown to equals down to a patronizing kindness manifested to inferiors; courtiness of address toward women included even very young girls and was so inwrought with the character that humorous innuendo or slanderous remark concerning women was absent from a

4. H. W. Ravenel, op. cit., p. 751.

5. Page, The Old-Time Negro, Scribners, November 1904, (Reprint).

conversation. The extraordinary sensitive honor was suggested in many ways.

The following story may give a Southern Planter's ideals of honor.

"And now a great blow fell on Thomas Dabney. Shortly before the war he had been asked by a trusted friend to put his name as security on some papers for many thousand dollars. At the time he was assured that his name would only be wanted to tide over a crisis of two weeks, and that he would never hear of the papers again. It was a trap set, and he put his name to the papers. Loving this man, and confiding in his honor as in a son's, he thought no more of the transaction.

"It was now the autumn of 1866. One night he walked upstairs to the room where his children were sitting, with a paper in his hand. 'My children,' he said, 'I am a ruined man. The sheriff is downstairs. He has served this writ on me. It is for a security debt.' He determined to pay every dollar. He was sixty-eight years of age with a large and helpless family.

"Thomas's relations and friends urged him to take the bankrupt law. It was madness, they said, for a man of his age, in the condition the country was in then, to talk of settling the immense debt that were against him. He refused with scorn to listen to such proposals.

"This meant rigid self-denial for himself and his children. He could not bear the thought of seeing his daughters deprived of comforts. He was ready to stand unflinchingly any fate that might be in store for him. But his tenderest feelings were stirred for them. His chivalrous nature had always revolted from the sight of a woman's doing hard work. He determined to spare his daughters all such labor as he could perform. General Sherman had said he would like to bring every Southern woman to the washtub. 'He shall never bring my daughters to the washtub,' Thomas Dabney said. 'I will do the washing myself.' And he did it for two years.

"When the living was so coarse and so ill-prepared that he could scarcely eat it, he never

failed, on rising from the table, to say earnestly and reverently, Thank the Lord for this much. He was fourteen years in paying these debts. He lived three years after the last dollar was paid."⁶

Southern men were proud of being gentlemen. This pride played its part holding to high standards. Southern honor was a local phenomenon; it was derived from the medieval sources, and was an anachronism in the nineteenth century, but it existed in the South because there men had become used to holding opinions as they held a wife, and allowing no question. His opinions, his word, his institution, all were sacred; he would not argue about them, or if he did it was no intention of admitting arguments on the other side.

The South expended its intellectual life in oratory at the courthouse or the state Capitol or the halls of Congress.

"The orators of the Old South have not been excelled in our national history. They were clever debaters on the science and art of statecraft. They diligently studied public questions; they had read the classic orators, and they constructed their speeches on the best models of the ancient art. In these old Southern statesmen the finest tradition of the school of Burke and Pitt and Fox still lived. Thus the energy of the most gifted men was spent on political discussion; the old-time Southerner was a politician by instinct and training, and his ambition was political. To him the spoken word was more than the written word. Consequently he sought preferment at the bar, on the bench, in the forum, and not in the world of

6. Susan Dabney Smedes, *Memorials of a Southern Planter*, p. 173-175.

letter."⁷

Plantation Home

The plantation home was patterned after the early mansion of Virginia. As the cotton crop increased and money was more plentiful the mansion became more beautiful.

"The Virginia home was a weather board house, one story and a half above the half-basement ground floor.

"It had quaint dormer windows, with small panes poking out from its sloping upstairs rooms, and long porches to shelter its walls from the sun.

"The house was usually erected on the side of a slope which was adorned with oaks and hickories sheltering the lawns; whilst in among them and all around were ash and maples, an evergreen or two, lilacs and syringas and roses, and locusts of every age and size."⁸

The background was usually the cottonfield. On one side was the orchard, beyond which peeped the barns, and back of them the pasture. A number of the prosperous and wealthy planters frequently came of old families and possessed homes of comfort and beauty. The broad halls were furnished with taste and often elegantly. This was the South of romance and the mammy songs, of juleps, colonels, blossoming magnolia, and happy laughter.

"Out of such homes, as the history of nation bear witness, came men who contributed to the

7. J. F. Metcalf, American Literature, p. 257.

8. T. N. Page, Social Life in Old Virginia, p. 8.

American reputation for statesmanship."⁹

Their incomes from cotton planting reaching \$100,000 and in some instances much more in a year. In summer they were seen with their families at Saratoga, Newport, and other fashionable Northern watering places. They held enviable positions in American society. Their intelligence, their large property interest, their superior abilities entitled them to occupy leading places in the direction of affairs in their respective states.

Plantation Furniture

The furniture was old-timey and plain, mahogany and rosewood bedstead and dressers black with age, and polished like mirrors, hung with draperies white as snow. The chairs were straight-backed; long sofas with claw feet; shining tables with slender brass-tipped legs, straight or fluted and bookcases filled with brown-backed much-read books.

"The secretary was the only piece of furniture the master pretended to know. For here he kept mysterious folded papers, and parcels, brown with stain of dust and age."¹⁰

The kitchen was sometimes separate from the house. Out of these kitchens came the most amazing meals.

"The better class of Southerners probably enjoyed

9. A. W. Calhoun, *A Social History of the American Family*, Vol. I, p. 69.

10. Mrs. Caroline H. Gilman, *Recollections of a Southern Matron*, p. 137.

more delicious food than any other American class."¹¹
The home and its furnishings was, in a peculiar fashion
supreme.

Holidays and Recreation

Holidays and recreation did have uncommon prominence
of all classes. The private race-course and the herd of
thoroughbreds were found on many Virginia and Kentucky
estates.

"Periods of relaxation were frequently turned to
mirth."¹²

"All seasons of co-operative labor yielded their
due measure of frivolity."¹³

Tournaments, cock-fights, fox-hunting, games, dances, the
social value of the old-fashioned court days, fairs, poli-
tical assemblages were occasions for merriment. Negro
wedding was a gay affair.

"The ceremony might be performed in the dining
room or in the hall by the master, or in one of
the quarters by a colored preacher, and the fam-
ily was on hand to get fun out of the entertain-
ment, and to recognize by their presence the
solemnity of the tie."¹⁴

The plantation was a pageant and a variety show in
alternation. The procession of plowmen at evening slouched
crosswise on their mules; the dance in the new sugarhouse,
preceded by proper bonfire in the quarters with contests

11. A. B. Hart, Slavery and Abolition, p. 24.

12. Turner's Magazine, The Plantation, March 1860, p. 46.

13. W. C. Bryant, A Tour of the Old South, p. 31.

14. W. H. Holcomb, Sketches of Plantation Life, p. 54.

in clogs, cakewalks and Charlestons whose fascinations were as yet undiscovered by the great world: the work songs in solo and refrain, with not too fast rhythm; the baptizing in the creek, with lively demonstrations from the "sisters" as they came dripping out; the torchlight pursuit of possum and coon, with the full-voiced haloo to baying houndawg and yelping cur; the rabbit hunt, the log-rolling, the house-raising, the husking bee, the quilting party and children's play, all punctuated plantation life. A funeral now and then of some prominent slave would bring festive sorrowing, or the death of a beloved master an outburst of emotion.

"Christmas was the great festival of the year on the plantation. The preparation began among the negroes some months before the boarding for the Christmas luxuries. The crops, and the chickens and the eggs and everything saleable were converted into dresses, shawls, and other wearing apparel, or the more substantial items of luxuries. The universal custom was to give three days holiday. Some few who had relations or friends would take the occasion, and in such cases their holiday was prolonged. The first step toward preparation was the collection of a good supply of firewood. The day before Christmas the beeves were slaughtered to be divided out the next day among the negroes, and other preparations of like nature were made to supply the house larder for the numerous visitors. The day was greeted by the negroes with a midnight religious service. The bell was rung to rouse the sleepers. There was not much sleep afterwards."¹⁵

15. H. W. Ravenel, op. cit., p. 767.

The southern home was always a welcome for the visitor, whatever his estate. Frequently guests would dine and remain over night with a family, when only their names were known; wondering clergymen were ever welcome; visiting sea captains were given cheer at all the homes, even overseers sat with the family by invitation and shared in their hospitality.

Music, dancing, riding, and cards were the chief amusements in the wealthy homes. Many of the homes were provided with harpsichords or with the newly invented "forte-piano." Dancing schools were regularly held, and attendance was at once part of the education and of the pleasure of the young people. Generally a meeting of the school was held fortnightly at the various homes, and the entire school lodged with the host of the occasion.

There were out of door events which added much to the enjoyment of life. The hospitable captain of some visiting vessel would invite the leading men and their families aboard and furnish lavish entertainment. It might be boat races, or a great dance, and a splendid dinner was always served. The general festivity, with its gathering of the aristocracy and its races, was the Fredericksburg Fair.

"Tuesday, October 4th, 1774. Went to Fredericksburg and seed a Horse Race for a Hundred Guineas, Gained by M. Fitchews Horse.

"Wednesday, 5th. This day a Horse race at Fredericksburg for Fifty pound, and it was gain'd by a Horse belonging to Col. Tails.

"Thursday, 6th. This day a Horse race at Fredericksburg for Fifty pound, and it was gained by a Horse belonging to M. Fitchew.

"Friday, 7th. The race this day at Fredericksburg for Fifty pound was gained again by another Horse belonging to M. Fitchew.

"Saturday, 8th. This day the races at Fredericksburg was finished, and this night finishes the Puppet shows, roape dancing etc, which has continued every night this week in town. I only seed the purse of a Hundred Guineas run for and that day I had the Misfortune to

have my Horse, saddle, and bridle stole from me, while I was doing some business in town. And I never could hear, nor get any intelligence of either of them again."¹⁶

It should be clearly understood, though, that sports and recreations did have uncommon prominence in the aspirations, and the activities of all classes. The private race-course and the herd of thoroughbreds could actually have been found on many Virginia and Kentucky estates.

"Henry Clay loved his silken-coated, fleet-footed thoroughbred horses. He loved the marvelously beautiful, gentry undulating fields and paddocks of the fairest pastoral country beneath the stars, the blue grass region of Old Kentucky. He loved all of Kentucky."¹⁷

¹⁶ Diary of John Harrower. The American Historical Review. Vol. VI p. 86.

¹⁷ The Satues of Henry Clay and Dr. Epraim McDowell. p. 31

CHAPTER IV

THE STRUCTURE OF SOCIETY

The general conception of a great privileged class, living in little isolated kingdoms, served by hosts of subordinates, enjoying hereditary rights to a sort of social primacy, this idea is firmly fixed in all artistic portrayal of plantation life. Variations on the central theme occur; the struggle of the merely rich to enter the charmed circle forms one motive; the effects of an uncommonly successful overseer to establish himself as a full-fledged planter is another. The homes of real social culture existed, but they were not proportionately numerous. Certain plantations were justly formed for high intellectual interests; many mansions could show creditable libraries, number of planters sent their boys to college, frequently to Northern schools, and employed tutors for their daughters.

The home was in a peculiar fashion supreme. This supremacy was due to the fact of isolation. Home had no competition from theatres, clubs, and other institutions of urban life. Interest was concentrated upon the family circle. The Southern home was unparalleled for its softening influence and reciprocal affection.

"The most cogent circumstance that bound the Southerners to slavery was the mode of life and personal habits and prejudices which it had engendered. The slaves had inflicted slavery on their masters. The latter had insensibly come to

compound the idea of labor with that of servitude; and thought it derogatory for a white man to work with his hands, as to have the overseer's whip laid across his back."¹

They conceived that to be a gentleman one must have slaves; they took pride in them as proofs of gentility; and they acquired those overbearing and despotic manners which are natural to men who exercise irresponsible power over their fellow creatures, nor is it surprising that such men should wear the same haughty bearing in their intercourse with the free white men of the north, in Congress and elsewhere. The fact that this conception of what belongs to a gentleman was based on a preposterous fallacy did not render it less prevalent or emphatic, and on the other hand, it did really create a lordly and charming society, with customs and traditions which endeared it to itself in an extreme and even passionate degree.

1. Julian Hawthorne, The History of the United States, Vol. II, p. 755.

"Socially, the Lower South inherited most of its customs and institutions from Virginia, which, besides being the mother of Presidents, was likewise the mother of states. Out of her strength came the strength of the Middle West; from the unwisdom, however much we bear in mind the undoubted charm, of her aristocratic class, which peopled the tide water region, came the necessity for migration into North Carolina, into the mountains, and thence through the varied channels, into the Lower South."²

The Southern people were content to have territorial expansion just as long as it strengthened their economic system; they even expressed a desire for Cuba. Sectionalism was bound to arise, the limitation of Agriculture to one product, cotton, demanded protection.

"The transmigration of the Southern planter with his caravan across the mountains was like that of Abraham of old from Hasen into Canaan; he came not only with his wealth, with all his household and children and servants and herds, but also with his political and social preconceptions and ideas already formed and crystallized, and all this he transplanted into the wilderness."³

The sparseness of population in the South encouraged an isolation that made for aloofness of methods on one hand, and for a characteristic individualism on the other. The patriarchal life developed a certain charm of manner, a certain prodigal hospitality that made the Southern home distinctive. When the Southern planter resorted to Charleston or to New Orleans for his annual combination of business and pleasure, he managed to stock himself with all the metropolitan enjoyment that the time and place afforded. That was his sole contact with the cosmopolitan world.

"The Southern Planter, aristocratic in his feelings rather than so in purse, would calculate to meet his neighbor only when their cross roads met."⁴

A church might be built here and the families could attend church services regularly

2. The South in the Building of the Nation. Vol. X, p. 18

3. Publications of the Mississippi Historical Society. Vol. I p. 469

4. The South in the Building of the Nation. Vol. X p. 21

The yeomanry, who felt themselves to a degree discriminated against by those above them, had developed within them a pride which discouraged any desire for labor, for fear that they might, more often than was good for their social position, be identified with the slaves.

"Andrew Jackson was the organizer of democracy. He taught the masses helpless and futile in the midst of their tools, and, he taught them how to use them. He mobilized the scattered forces of ordinary men; vitalized them with his energy, fired them with his faith, and made sharpshooters of them every one. He made the trapper in the wilderness, the worker on the wharf, the toiler in the field realize that the Government is his government in days of peace as well as when he is solemnly reminded of it in days of battle."⁵

These farmers had many qualities of the wealthy planters; they were not inhospitable, they sometimes shared the sectional point of view and accumulated reasonable wealth.

"The evidence is overwhelming that farmers of the cotton states were enthusiastic advocates of slavery, whether they owned slaves or not. For it was through slavery that they saw their only opportunity to increase their wealth and to improve their social standing."⁶

Families inter-married and built up cliques which ruled socially and politically. The aristocratic Southerner laid far more stress on family, land, agreeable manners, and political power than he did on mere wealth; and the long days on the plantation led him to cherish social life as an art. His house was no bigger or better than the rich Northerners', for the best of the Southern houses, such as "Westover," were merely comfortable, moderate-sized country houses, which could easily be duplicated in New England and elsewhere in the North. Nor was there more luxury in the South in spite of the romantic tradition. The silver plate gleamed as lavishly on Northern mahogany as on Southern.

5. Statue of Andrew Jackson proceedings in Statuary Hall House Document no. 430. p. 69.

6. De Bow, J. D. B. Interest in Slavery of the Southern Non-Slaveholder p. 272

The difference lay in the hundreds or thousands of acres which surrounded the Southern's houses, and made of their owners something quite different from merely rich men. It lay in the scores to hundreds of slaves which made of their owners something different from the employer of casual labor in the North. It lay in the ideal of public life and participation in it as part of one's social status, and in the presence of a subordinate race, all of which gave the Southerner the sense of belonging to a genuinely governing class.

"It was not by accident that the South sent her ablest men to Washington until 1860; that they occupied such a number of high national offices as was out of all proportion to her white population, or that most of the best of society in Washington was Southern until that city became practically the social centre of the South rather than the nation."⁷

The plantation was the ideal community of the South, its laws and usages as dominant socially as its economic influences was dominant politically. The economic influences that played upon plantation development were of large significance.

7. Adams, James Truslow, *America's Tragedy*. p. 89.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

This system as it was introduced and promoted by the Southern Planter was almost feudal for the ownership of land and slaves with its duties and responsibilities to dependents as well as definite claims upon them. It gave rise to a one-sided economic order. The large scale agriculture which developed, precariously dependent upon a passive commerce and foreign market, diverted labor and capital disproportionately from everything else and left the South later on without adequate manufactures. Also it tended to concentrate the wealth in the hands of a relatively small class, with the result that class distinction evolved. Slavery was looked upon solely from the viewpoint of making profit. The desire was the maximum application of human energy in production at a minimum expense.

The Southern Planter desired to have things remain as they were politically and economically. He saw intensely the claims of his own state and section to the exclusion of others. Free lands meant free opportunity and promoted individualism, economic equality, freedom to rise, democracy.

This life was full of graciousness and hospitality and all the high social virtues that came of a feudal aristocracy; it aimed toward conservatism and individualism.

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